THE PALFREY;

A LOVE-STORY OF OLD TIMES.

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By LEIGH HUNT.

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L'Envoy.

To HER, who loves all peaceful glory,
Therefore laurell'd song and story;
Who, as blooming maiden should,
Married blest, with young and good;
And whose rare zeal for healthy duties
Set on horseback half our beauties;
Hie thee, little book, and say—
(Blushing for leave unbegg'd, alway;
And yet how beg it for one flower
Cast in the path of Sovereign Power?)
Say that thy verse, though small it be,
Yet woo'd by ancient minstrelsy
To sing of youth escap'd from age,
Scenes pleasant, and a Palfrey sage,
And meditated, morn by morn,
Among the trees where she was born,
Dares come, on grateful memory's part,
Not to Crown'd Head, but to Crown'd Heart.

Kensington, April the Fifth. Leigh Hunt.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

PREFACE.

THE following story is a variation of one of the most amusing of the old French narrative poems that preceded the time of Chaucer, with additions of the writer's invention. The original, which he did not see till it was completed, is to be found in the collection of Messrs. Barbazan and Méon, (*Fabliaux et Contes des Poètes François des* 11, 12, 13, 14, *et* 15*e Siècles*, &c. Edition 1808.) His own originals were the prose abridgment of M. le Grand, (*Fabliaux*, &c., third edition, volume the fourth,) and its imitation in verse by Messrs. Way and Ellis, inserted in the notes to the select translations from Le Grand by the former of those gentlemen.

The scene of the old story,—the only known production of a poet named Huon le Roi, (possibly one of the "Kings of the Minstrels," often spoken of at that period,) is laid in the province of Champagne; but as almost all the narrative poems under the title of *Lays* (of which this is one) are with good reason supposed to

have had their source in the Greater or Lesser Britain, —that is to say, either among the Welsh of this island, or their cousins of French Brittany,—and as the only other local allusions in the poem itself are to places in England, the author has availed himself of the common property in these effusions claimed for the Anglo-Norman Muse,

" Begirt with British and Armorick knights,"

to indulge himself in a licence universal with the old minstrels, and lay the scene of his version where and when he pleased; to wit, during the reign of Edward the First, and in Kensington, Hendon, and their neighbourhoods, — old names, however new they sound. There is reason to believe, that the woody portions of Kensington, still existing as the Gardens and in the neighbourhood of Holland House, are part of the ancient forest of Middlesex, which extended from this quarter to the skirts of Hertfordshire: and it is out of regard for these remnants of the old woods, and associations with them still more grateful, that I have placed the scene of my heroine's abode on the site of the existing Palace, and the closing scene of the poem in the hall of the De Veres, Earls of Oxford, who had a mansion at that period in the grounds of the present Holland House, near the part called the Moats.

The circumstance of the Palfrey's being ridden into

this hall in the King's presence, will hardly need vindication to readers the least conversant with old customs; but it may not be considered too trifling to observe, that the horse called a Palfrey was not, as it is generally supposed to have been, a lady's horse only; much less was its employment by the other sex confined to persons of inferior condition, as a careless passage in Dryden would imply; or even, for any thing I can discover, common with them at all. Dryden, in his version of the *Knight's Tale* from Chaucer, says,

> "The smiths and armourers on palfreys ride;"

but Chaucer simply says of these handicraftsmen of the tournament, that they were on horseback; and he assigns the palfreys to the lords.

> "To the paleis rode there many a route
> Of lordés upon stedés and palfrèis."

The palfrey indeed was so expressly a trained or managed horse, and therefore a beast of pretension, that Barbazan derives its appellation from the fact;* and though the old writers generally imply that it was a horse upon a peace establishment, in contradistinction to a war-horse (the steed, or *destrier*), yet

* "*Palefroi: cheval instruit au manège, aux exercices;*" and he says it comes from *palæstra* and *fractus;* which seems a harsh though it may be the remote etymology. Might not *pale* (the root of *palissade*) and *frein*, a bridle, be nearer? *Palefrenier* is a groom.

I think it probable that it was originally the only horse used in those peaceful imitations of war, the tilt and tournament. It certainly often was used in them, and in battle too; though by degrees it came to be employed chiefly as a saddle-horse or hackney, and ultimately to mean simply a lady's horse, doubtless from training being always identified with its education. The horse ridden by her Majesty at the present day will be a Palfrey in all the forms; that is to say, of spirit enough perhaps for any service, but at all events of "gentle breeding," graceful with its spirit, and trained in the riding-house.

It may be allowed me to add, that the circumstance intimated respecting Queen Eleonora,—her being always with the King, wherever he appeared,—is true to history; and that although a time has arrived, at which the world has turned a corner out of the old doubts and darkness into the sunshine of unavertable progression, and the interests of all classes may be best consulted by a willingness to speak the best of all, yet I should not have allowed an honest pen to be beguiled by some endearing traits of domestic character into a respectful treatment of the memory of Edward the First with all his abilities, had the alleged stain upon it of the massacre of the Welsh bards been any longer understood to be true. But historians now agree that

there is no proof of it. On the other hand, his patronage of the song and literature of his time is undoubted. He not only took his harper with him to the Holy Land, (which any prince perhaps might have done, as a matter of course,) but the minstrels made an express figure in his court on an occasion touching to his personal feelings, (the knighting of his son); and although custom might possibly be found to account for this circumstance also, yet the bent of his inclinations was made manifest, when he visited Sicily on his return from the East, by his inviting into England the author of the once-favourite cycle of classic romance, Guido dalle Colonne, first introducer among us of "the tale of Troy divine."

The style of the little poem thus presented to the reader (the pretensions of which, if he is as choice and reverent in his notions of poetry as I am myself, he will be good enough to look upon as commensurate with the size) has been modelled to a certain extent upon that of the old English romances and ballads; not only on account of the period at which the action takes place, but because the passion and simplicity of the old modes of speech, particularly in these mixed subjects of levity and gravity, allow a writer to give way to the sincerity of his own feelings, without startling the conventionalities of modes that are reigning.

The measure of the verse is the same as that of Coleridge's *Christabel*, four beatings of the time in each, of whatever number of syllables it may consist; and if, without pretending to compete with the profound beauties of that poem, I may borrow a privilege from advancing years to express a hope that I can do something, after my lighter fashion, in the cause of pertinent images and unsuperfluous words,—terrible *desiderata* in these *ad libitum* rhyming times,—I trust that my occasionally running riot upon a rhyme of my own for several verses together, will not render an impulse in keeping with the subject liable to be confounded with a violation of the laws of conciseness.

Thus much in regard to what is, perhaps, altogether a small matter. And yet I cannot conclude this (I fear) long preface to a short story, without recommending to poetical readers, a closer intimacy than has yet been cultivated with these first spring blossoms of French and British genius, called *Lais* and *Fabliaux*. All the world is acquainted with the reputation of the Provençal, or southern French lyrical poets, the precursors of Petrarch; but the very existence, in England and north-western France, of a light narrative poetry, of genuine and sometimes exquisite merit, heralding and assisting to inspire the geniuses of Chaucer and Boccaccio, is a fact better known to poetical antiquaries,

than familiar, as it deserves to be, to the lovers of verse in general. Its prolixity (the result of a want of information for the many) the reader may soon learn the art of skimming over. The cynical plain-speaking of some of the stories, sometimes on the most revolting subjects, and of an excess almost amounting to a sort of horrible innocence, is still more easily avoided by those who chuse to take the alarm. But the gushing tenderness of others, the simple and sensitive words of honest passion and delight, free from the haunting fears of criticism and correctness, the healthy and hearty vigour, sometimes even sublimity, the belief in every thing good and lovely, the fresh and laughing morning lip, carolling in the sunshine and happy in the arms of nature, these are suggesters of first principles in poetry always salutary to recur to, and the more so in proportion as society advances, because custom and convention perpetually tend, not only to make us forget, but be ashamed of them. Above all, it appears to me calculated to do our native poetry good, on a side upon which, great and abundant as it is on all others the very highest, it is not so complete as the rest,—I mean, that of animal spirits. It might assist us in that respect, as our graver feelings were encouraged into purity and depth of utterance by the *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, the best gift ever bestowed by

critic upon modern genius. Courage is a "drug" on both sides of the Channel, and abundant also are the harvests of wit and humour: yet Béranger in France, and "Christopher North" in Scotland, are almost the only living authors who, in a poem not comic, would have animal spirits enough to venture to say of a knight, in speaking of his contempt of the luxuries of the table, that "his sugar-plums were the points of broken swords; and his mustard lances; and his pepper made of powdered hauberks?" adding, with a sublimity which Milton himself would not have surpassed, had he written on his meditated subject of *King Arthur* instead of *Paradise Lost*, that he "went to sleep to the noise of thunder," and that his drink—(and here again the animal spirits come grandly into play)—"his drink was the great dust, and the breath of horses." Chaucer never beat that; who had good fellowship and sublimity both. I should have enriched the description of my hero by transferring these hearty and noble ideas into the present poem, had the general circumstances under which he appears warranted me in so increasing the weight of his metal. He should have been still more of a warrior than a lover, to render it proper; or at all events, the poem should have been longer, and have shown him in a light more habitually formidable. The temp-

tation was great; but consistency forced me to say it nay.*

Unfortunately, a thorough acquaintance with these interesting productions is not to be obtained but through the medium of a language often requiring the help of glossaries and old dictionaries; of which there is a large one for the express purpose, entitled *Glossaire de la Langue Romane.* (Paris, 1808, in two volumes;

* Mr. Ellis, who has quoted part of the original passage in his notes to Way's *Fabliaux*, (vol. i. p. 188,) translates it literally, and seems to think that the meaning is rendered too harsh by its phraseology; but surely even the literalities of one language are to be understood by the spirit of another, if their effect does not remain entirely the same in both. Not to mention, that received phrases in a language may not have precisely the same meaning at different periods.

> " Ne ne demande autres dragiés
> Que pointes d'espées brisiés:
> Et fers de glaive *a la moustarde*
> C'est un mes qui forment lie tarde,
> Et haubers des mailliés *au poivre.*"

Which Ellis translates,

> Nor doth he demand other sugar-plums
> Than the points of swords broken;
> And the iron of lances with mustard
> Is a food which much pleaseth him;
> And the broken meshes of hauberks with pepper.

" The two next lines," he adds, " are very animated:—

> " Et veut la grant poudriere boivre
> Avec l'aleine des chevaus."

For my part, I can take letter and metaphor mixed up together, if the old poet wishes it,—his lances *with* mustard, instead of their being mustard themselves, and his hauberks bedevilled *with* pepper. Any thing, so long as the spirit of such cookery is not lost upon us.

with an Appendix subsequently added, making three.) But the student, to encourage himself, will easily pick his way into some of the best passages by the help of the intimations in M. le Grand's abridgments, and in the poetical versions of Mr. Way. And there is a work of Mr. Way's friend, Mr. Ellis,—most likely known to him already,—the *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances*,—which is a masterly analysis of similar stories, chiefly translated also from the Norman Muse, and containing passages from our ancient poetry, congenial in truth and vivacity with those of its originals. The names of such of the authors as wrote in English are almost all unfortunately lost; but Englishmen, as well as Normans, wrote in French also at the courts of the early Henrys and Edwards; (Gower's best poems are in that language as late as the reign of Edward the Third): and as we know not how much of the anonymous portion of the literature was theirs, and their Norman brethren avowedly took most of their Lays from "the olde gentil Bretons," as Chaucer calls them, in a passage where he acknowledges his obligations for the *Franklin's Tale*, it would surely be well to popularize among us, if possible, the best of these poems, both anonymous and otherwise, comprising the pleasant effusions of Guérin, and Henri d'Andeli, and Huon le Roi, and Jean de Condé and

others, and a poetess who seems to have surpassed them all in her love for British genius, "Mary of France," otherwise called "Mademoiselle Marie," authoress of those graceful tales of enchantment, *Sir Lanval* and *Sir Gugemer*, and of the pathetic *Lai del Freisne*, and that other most affecting story, the *Mountain of the Two Lovers*. Her works not long ago were collected into two volumes by her countrymen; who, in duties of this kind, even towards other nations, are by far the most industrious as well as tasteful of any people in Europe. It might be grateful in us, at all events, not to remain more ignorant of the very names of these precursors of the great Father of English Poetry, than we are of those of the birds in our orchards, whose singing precedes the rise of our summer dawns.

*** Should the public receive with indulgence the present attempt to obey the cheerful impulses occasioned by Norman song, the author will be happy to give them others.

THE PALFREY.

Part First.

THE PALFREY GOES, THE PALFREY GOES,
MERRILY WELL THE PALFREY GOES;
HE CARRIETH LAUGHTERS, HE CARRIETH WOES,
YET MERRILY EVER THE PALFREY GOES.

'Tis June, and a bright sun burneth all.
Sir William hath gallop'd from Hendon Hall
To Kensington, where in a thick old wood
(Now its fair Gardens) a mansion stood,
Half like fortress, and half like farm,
A house which had ceas'd to be threaten'd with harm.
The gates frown'd still, for the dignity's sake,
With porter, portcullis, and bit of a lake;

But ivy caress'd their warm old ease,
And the young rooks chuckled across the trees,
And burning below went the golden bees.
The spot was the same, where on a May morn
The Rose that toppeth the world was born.

Sir William hath gallop'd, and well was bent
His palfrey to second a swift intent;
And yet, having come, he delayeth his knock,
E'en though a sweet maiden counteth the clock
Till she meet his eye from behind the chair,
Where sitteth Sir Guy with his old white hair.
But the youth is not rich; and day by day
Sir Guy groweth cold, and hath less to say,
And daunteth his wit with *haws* and *hums*,
Coughing with grandeur, and twirling his thumbs,
Till visiting turneth to shame and gall,
And Sir William must speak what endangereth all.

Now, for any deed else, in love or in war,
Knight bolder was none, than the knight De la Barre,

(So styled by the King, from a traitor tall
Whom he pitch'd over barriers, armour and all);
Short distance made he betwixt point and hilt;
He was not a man that at tourney and tilt
Sat bowing to every fair friend he could spy,
Or bearing his fame with a fine cold eye:
A hundred sweet eyes might be watching his own;
He thought but of two, and of steeds to be thrown;
And the trumpets no sooner blew mights to mights,
Than crash went his onset, and down went knights.

And thus in his love for sweet Anne de Paul,
Though forc'd to some stealths, 'twas honest withal:
He wooed, though the old man ever was by,
With talk such as fixeth a maiden's eye,
With lore and with legends, earnest of heart,
And an art that applied them, sprung out of no art,
Till stealth for his sake seem'd truth's own right;
And at an old casement long clos'd, one night,
Through boughs never dry, in a pathless nook,
Love's breathless delight in his vows she took.
Ah! never thenceforth, by sunniest brook,

Did the cheeks of the cherry-trees beat the look
Of the poor-growing stems in the pathless nook.

But, alas ! to plead love unto loving eyes,
And to beg for its leave of the worldly wise,
All humility sweet on the one side lies,
And all on the other that mortifies.

Sir William hath swallow'd a sigh at last,
Big as his heart; and the words have pass'd.
" I love your daughter, Sir Guy," quoth he,
" And though I'm not rich, yet my race may be;
A race with a scutcheon as old as the best,
Though its wealth lies at Acre in holy rest.
Mine uncle, your friend, so blithe and old,
Hath nobody nigher to leave his gold :
The King hath been pleas'd to promise my sword
The picking of some great Frenchman's hoard ;
And sire, meantime, should not blush for wife;
Soft as her hand should fare her life;
My rents, though small, can support her state,
And I'd fight for the rest, till I made them great.

Vouchsafe to endure that I seek her love :
I know she resembles the blest above ;
Her face would paint sweeter a monarch's bower,
Though glory and grace were in every flower ;
But angels on monarchs themselves look down,
And love is to love both coffer and crown."

Sir William ended, he scarce knew why,
(But 'twas pity of self, to move pity thereby,)
With a sad, perchance with an abject sigh,
And stoop'd and kiss'd the hand of Sir Guy :—
Steady and sharp was the old man's eye.

" Sir William, no doubt, is a bold young knight,"
Quoth he, " and my daughter a beauty bright ;
And a beauty bright and a bold young man
Have suited, I wot, since the world began.
But the man that is bold, and hath money beside,
Cometh best arm'd for a beauteous bride.
The court will be riding this way next week,
To honour the Earl's fat chimney reek ;
And softly will many a bold bright eye
Fall on the face no face comes nigh.

You speak of mirth, and you speak of age,
Not in a way very civil or sage.
Your kinsman, the friend whom you call so old,
But ten years less than myself hath told:
And I count not this body so ancient still,
As to warrant green years to talk of my will.
Let him come, if he please (I shall greet the friend)
And show me which way his leavings tend,
And then we can parley of courtings best:
Till when, I advise you to court his chest."

Sir William he boweth as low as before,
And after him closeth the soft room-door,
And he moaneth a moan, and half staggereth he;
He doubteth which way the stairs may be.
But the lower his bow, and the deeper his moan,
The redder the spot in his cheek hath grown,
And he loatheth the kiss to the hard old hand.
"May the devil," thought he, "for his best new brand
Pluck it, and strike to his soul red-hot!
Why scorn me, and mock me? and why, like a sot,
Must I stoop to him, low as his own court-plot?

Will any one tell us,—will Nature declare,—
How father so foul can have daughter so fair?
But her mother of angels dreamt in her sorrow,
And hence came this face,—this dimpled May-morrow."

And as he thought thus, from a door there stole
A hand in a tremble, a balm to his soul;
And soft though it trembled, it close wrung his,
And with it a letter;—and gone it is.

Sir William hath dash'd in the forest awhile,
His being seems all a hasty smile;
And there, by green light and the cooing of doves,
He readeth the letter of her he loves,
And kisseth, and readeth, again and again;
His bridle is dropp'd on his palfrey's mane,
Who turneth an ear, and then, wise beast,
Croppeth the herbage,—a prudent feast:
For Sir William no sooner hath read nine times,
Than he deemeth delay the worst of crimes:
He snatcheth the bridle, and shakes it hard,
And is off for his life on the loud green sward;

He foameth up steep, and he hisseth in stream,
And saluteth his uncle like one in a dream.

"Sir William, Sir William, what chase is this?
Have you slain a fat buck, or stolen a kiss?
And is all the world, on account of his wife,
After poor dripping Sir William's life?"

"Most honour'd of kinsmen," Sir William cried,
"Nought have I stolen, but hope of a bride;
Her father, no Christian like her, but a Jew,
Would make me refund; which grieveth her too.
You know who she is; but have yet to know,
What a rose in the shade of that rock could grow;
What fulness of beauty on footstalk light;
What a soul for sweet uncle to love at sight.
Ah! Sir, she loveth your own blithe fame,
And dareth, she saith, in your sister's name
Entreat me the loan of some fields of corn,
Which her dowry shall buy on the bridal morn.
I blush, dear uncle; I drop mine eye-lids;
Yet who should blush when a lady bids?

'Tis lending me bliss; 'tis lending me life;
And she'll kiss you withal, saith the rosy wife."

"Ah, ha!" quoth Sir Grey, with his twinkling eyes:
"The lass, I see, is both merry and wise;
I call her to mem'ry, an earnest child,
Now looking straight at you, now laughing wild:
'Tis now—let me see—five long years ago,
And that's a good time for such buds to blow.
Well,—dry your outside, and moisten your in;
This wine is a bud of my oldest bin;
And we'll talk of the dowry, and talk of the day,
And see if her bill be good, boy, eh?"

Sir Grey didn't say, You're my sister's son,
I have left you my gold, and your work is done.—
He hated to speak of his gold, like death;
And he lov'd a good bill, as he lov'd his breath;
And yet, for all that, Sir Grey, I trow,
Was a very good man, as corn-dealers go.

So the lover hath seiz'd the new old hand,
And kiss'd it, as though it had given the land,

And invok'd on its bounty such bliss from above,
Thought he, "Of a truth, I *am* mean in love."
But free was his fervour from any such vice;
For when obligation's more fitting than nice,
We double the glow of our thanks and respect,
To hide from th' obliger his own defect.

"That palfrey of thine 's a good palfrey, Will;
He holdeth his head up, and danceth still,
And trippeth as light by the ostler's side,
As though just saddled to bear your bride;
And yet, by Saint Richard, as drench'd is he
And as froth'd, as though just out of the sea:
Fleck'd like a pie, from a plunge in the sea.
Methinks I hear him just landed free,
Shaking him and his saddle right thunderously.
And he starteth at nothing?"

"No more than the wall."

"And is sure of his footing?"

"As monarch in hall.

He's a thunder in fight, and a thief on the road,
So swiftly he speedeth, whatever his load;

Yet round the wolf's den half a day will he hover,
And carrying a lady, takes heed like a lover."

" And therefore Sir William will part with him never?"

" Nay, uncle, he will ;—for ever and ever."

" And what such a jewel may purchase, I pray ?"

" Thanks, thanks, dearest uncle, and not saying Nay.
Now prythee deny me not grace so small :
The palfrey in truth is comely withal,
And you still shall lend him to bear my bride ;
But whom, save our help, should he carry beside ?"

" I'm vex'd."

" For pity."

" I'm griev'd."

" Now pray."

" 'Tis cheap," thought the uncle, " this not saying Nay."

THE PALFREY.

Part Second.

THE PALFREY GOES, THE PALFREY GOES,
MERRILY EVER THE PALFREY GOES;
NOUGHT HE CARRIETH NOW BUT WOES,
AND YET FULL WELL THE PALFREY GOES.

Sir Grey and Sir Guy, like proper old boys,
Have met, with a world of coughing and noise;
And after subsiding, judiciously dine,
Serious the venison, and chirping the wine.
They talk of the court, now gathering all
To the sunny plump smoke of Earl-Mount Hall:
And pity their elders laid up on the shelves,
And abuse ev'ry soul upon earth but themselves:

Only Sir Grey doth it rather to please,
And Sir Guy out of honest old spite and disease:
For Sir Guy hath a face so round and so red,
The whole of his blood seemeth hanging his head;
While Sir Grey's red face is waggish and thin,
And he peereth with uprais'd nose and chin.

Nathless, Sir Grey excepteth from blame
His nephew Sir Will, and his youthful fame;
And each soundeth t'other, to learn what hold
The youth and the lady may have of his gold.
Alas! of his gold will neither speak,
Tho' the wine it grew strong, and the tongue grew weak;
And when the sweet maiden herself appears,
With a breath in her bosom, and blush to her ears,
And the large thankful eyes of the look of a bride,
Sir Grey recollecteth no creature beside:
He watcheth her in, he watcheth her out;
He measureth her ancle, but not with his gout;
He chucketh, like chanticleer over a corn,
And thinks it but forty years since he was born.

"Why, how now, Sir Grey? methinks you grow young:
How soon are your own wedding bells to be rung?
You stare on my daughter, like one elf-struck."

"Alas! and I am,—the sadder my luck:—
Albeit, Sir Guy, your own shoulders count
Years not many more than mine own amount,
And I trust you don't feign to be too old to wed?"

"Hoh! hoh!" quoth Sir Guy; "that was cunningly said."
(Yet he felt flatter'd too, did the white old head.)

"What *are* years?" continued Sir Grey, looking bold:
"There are men never young, and men never old.
Old and young lips may carol in tune;
Green laugheth the oak 'gainst the brown mid June.
Lo! dapper Sir Kit, with his large young wife;
His big-legged babes are the pride of his life."

Sir Guy shook his head.

"And the stout old lord,
Whose wife sitteth front him so meek at his board."

"Ay, ay," quoth Sir Guy, "and stuffeth so fast,
His eyesight not reaching the lady's repast."
"Well, well," quoth Sir Grey—
"Ill, ill," quoth Sir Guy;
"The children of old men full well I descry;
They look, by Saint Christendom! old as themselves;
Are dwarf'd; are half wither'd; they grin like elves."

"They may," quoth Sir Grey, "when both parents [are old,
Or when the old parent is wrinkle-soul'd;
But not when he's hearty and merry as we.
You grieve me, Sir Guy. Oh! 'tis doleful to see
How vainly a friend may come here for a bride,
Though he loveth the daughter, and father beside."

"Gramercy, gramercy, dear friend," crieth Guy:
What, you? What, Sir Grey? with his ever-bright eye?
We talk'd of the old, but who talk'd of Sir Grey?
But speak ye right soberly? mean what ye say?"

"Ay, truly I do," with a sigh crieth Grey;
"As truly as souls that for Paradise pray.

And hark ye, dear friend, you'll miss your sweet Anne,
If she weddeth, I wot, some giddy young man.
He'll bear her away, and be lov'd alone,
And wish, and yet grudge, your very tomb-stone.
Now give her to me, I'll give her my gold,
And I'll give to yourself my wood and my wold,
And come and live here, and we'll house together,
And laugh o'er our cups at the winter weather."

"A bargain! a bargain!" cried old Sir Guy,
With a stone at his heart, and the land in his eye;
"Your hand to the bargain, my dear old friend:
My 'old' did I call thee? My world without end.
I'll bustle her straight; and to keep all close,
You shall carry her with you, ere creature knows,
Save Rob, and Sir Rafe, and a few beside,
For guests and for guards to the travelling bride;
And so, ere the chattering court come down,
Wed her at home in your own snug town."

Now a murrain, I say, on those foul old men!
I never, myself, shall see fifty again,

And can pity a proper young-blooded old fellow,
Whose heart is green, though his cheek be yellow;
For Nature, albeit she never doth wrong,
Yet seemeth in such to keep youth too long:
And 'tis grievous when such an one seeth his bliss
In a face which can see but the wrinkles in his.
Ah! pray let him think there are dames not young,
For whom the bells yet might be handsomely rung.
'Tis true, grey-beards *have* been, like Jove's of old,
That have met a young lip, nor been thought too bold.
In Norfolk a wondrous old lord hath been seen,
Who at eighty was not more than forty, I ween;
And I myself know a hale elderly man,
In face and in frolic a very god Pan.
But marvels like these are full rare, I wis;
And when elders in general young ladies would kiss,
I exhort the dear souls to fight and to flee,
Unless they should chance to run against me.

Alas! I delay as long as I can,
For who may find words for thy grief, sweet Anne?
'Tis hard when young heart, singing songs of to-morrow,
Is suddenly met by the old hag, Sorrow.

She fainteth, she prayeth, she feeleth sore ill;
She wringeth her hands; she cannot stand still;
She tasteth the madness of wonder and will;—
Nor, sweet though she was, had she yielded at last,
Had Sir Guy not his loathly old plethora cast
In the scale against love and its life-long gains,
And threaten'd her fears for his bursting veins.
"I'll wed him," she wrote to Sir William;—"yes;
But nothing on earth—" and here her distress
Broke away, and she wept, and the tears fell hot
On the paper, and made a great starry blot.
Alas! tears and letter burn under the eye
Of watchful, unmerciful, old Sir Guy;
And so, on a night, when all things round,
Save the trees and the moon, were sleeping sound,
From his casement in shadow he sees his child,
Bent in her weeping, yet alway mild,
The fairest thing in the moon's fair ray,
Borne like some bundle of theft away;
Borne by a horde of old thieves away,
The guests and the guards of false Sir Grey.

She pray'd, but she spake out aloud no word;
She wept, but no breath of self-pity was heard:

Her woe was a sight for no dotards to see;
And yet not bereft of all balm was she;
One balm there was left her, one strange but rare,
Nay, one in the shape of a very despair;
To wit, the palfrey that wont to bear
The knight De la Barre on his daily way
To her, and love, and false Sir Grey.
Him it had borne, her now it bore;
And weeping sweet, though more and more,
And praying for its master's bliss,
(Oh! no true love will scoff at this,)
She stoop'd, and gave its neck a kiss.

THE PALFREY.

Part Third.

THE PALFREY GOES, THE PALFREY GOES,
MERRILY STILL THE PALFREY GOES;
HE GOES A PATH HE NEVER CHOSE,
YET STILL FULL WELL THE PALFREY GOES.

WALMSLEY

Could the sweet moon laugh, its light
Had surely been convuls'd that night,
To see fifteen old horsemen wag
Their beards, to one poor maiden's nag;
Fifteen old beards in chat and cough,
Rumbling to keep the robbers off,
And ever and aye, when lanes grew close,
Following each the other's nose,

And with the silver beam she cast
Tipp'd, like every tree they pass'd.
The owls they seem'd to hoot their folly
With a staring melancholy.

After jealous sort, I wis,
Cull'd Sir Grey these guests of his,
Not a soul so young as he
Gracing all his chivalry:
Six there were, of toothless fame,
With each his man, of jaws as tame;
Then, his own, the palsiest there;
And last, Sir Guy's, with whitest hair:
And each had snugg'd him for the night
In old flapp'd hat and cap as white,
In double cloak and three-fold hose,
Besides good drink to warm his toes,
And so they jog it, beard and nose,
And in the midst the palfrey goes;
Oh! ever well the palfrey goes;
He knows within him what he knows,
And so, full well the palfrey goes.

But in his hamlet hous'd apart,
How far'd meantime Sir William's heart?
Oh, when the sun first went to bed,
Not richer look'd the golden head,
Nor cast a more all-gladdening eye:
He seem'd to say, "My heav'n is nigh."
For he had heard of rare delights
Between those two old feasting knights,
And of a pillion, new and fair,
Ordain'd to go some road as rare;
With whom? For what sweet rider's art?
Whose, but the dancer's at his heart,
The light, the bright, yet balmy she,
And who shall fetch her home but he?
Who else be summon'd speedily
By the kind uncle full of glee
To fetch away that ecstasy?
So ever since that news, his ear,
Listening with a lofty fear,
Lest it catch one sound too late,
Stood open like a palace gate,
That waits the bride of some great king,
Heard with her trumpets travelling.

At length a letter. Whose? Sir Guy's,
The father's own. With reverent eyes,
With heart, impatient to give thanks,
And tears that top their glimmering banks,
He opens, reads, turns pale as death;
His noble bosom gasps for breath:
His Anne has left his love for gold,
But in her kindness manifold
Extorted from his uncle's hoard
Enough to leave him bed and board.
Ah! words like those were never Anne's;
Too plainly they the coarse old man's;
But still the letter; still the fact;
With pangs on pangs his heart is rack'd.
Love is an angel; has no pride;
She'll mourn his love when he has died:
Yet love is truth; so hates deceit;
He'll pass, and scorn her, in the street.
Now will he watch her house at night
For glimpse of her by some brief light,
Such as perhaps his own pale face
May show; and then he'll quit the place.

Now he will fly her, hate, detest,
Mock; make a by-word and a jest:
Then he hates hate; and who so low
As strike a woman's fame? No, no;
False love might spite the faithless Anne,
But true was aye the gentleman.
Thus paceth he, 'twixt calm and mad,
Till the mid watch his chamber sad;
And then lies down in his day-dress,
And sleeps for very weariness,
Catching and starting in his moan,
And waking with a life-long groan.
Sometimes he dreams his sorrow makes
Such weeping wail, that as he wakes,
He lifts his pitying hand to try
His cheek, and wonders it is dry.
Sometimes his virgin bride and he
Are hous'd for the first time, and free
To dwell within each other's eyes;
And then he wakes with woful cries.
Sometimes he hears her call for aid;
Sometimes beholds her bright array'd,

But pale, and with her eyes on earth;
And once he saw her pass in mirth,
And look at him, nor eye let fall,
And that was wofull'st dream of all.
At length he hears, or thinks he hears,—
(Or dreams he still with waking ears?)
A tinkle of the house's bell!
What news can midnight have to tell?
He listens. No. No sound again.
The breeze hath stirr'd the window-pane;
Perchance it was the tinkling glass;
Perchance 'twas his own brain, alas!
His own weak brain, which hears the blood
Pulse at his ears,—a tingling flood,
Strange mantler in as strange a cup.
Yet hark again!—He starts; leans up;—
It seems to fear to wake a mouse,
That sound;—then peals, and wakes the house.

But first, to end what I began,
The journey of sweet houseless Anne.

THE PALFREY.

Part Fourth.

THE PALFREY GOES, THE PALFREY GOES,
MERRY AND WELL THE PALFREY GOES;
YOU CANNOT GUESS, TILL TIME DISCLOSE,
HOW PERFECTLY WELL THE PALFREY GOES.

Ah ! dream Sir William what he might,
Little he dreamt the truth that night.
Could but some friend have told him all,
How had he spurr'd from Hendon Hall,
And dash'd among the doting set,
Who bore away that soft cheek wet !

How had the hills by which they go,
Re-echo'd to his dire "Hallo!"
Startling the waking farmers' ears
With thoughts of thieves and murderers,
And scattering wide those owlish men,
While close he clasp'd his dove again.
But where I left them, safe go they,
Their drowsy noses droop'd alway
To meet the beard's attractive nest,
Push'd upwards from the muffled breast.
Drowsy they nod, and safe they go;
Sir Grey's good steeds the country know,
And lead the rest full soft and well,
Till snore on snore begins to swell,
Warm as owl-plumage, toned as bell;
True snores, compos'd of spices fine,
Supper, fresh air, and old mull'd wine.
At first they wake with start and fright,
And sniff and stare with all their might,
And sit, one moment, bolt upright:
But soon reverts each nodding crown;
It droops, it yields, it settles down;

Till in one snore, sincere and deep,
The whole grave train are fast asleep.
Sir Grey, the youngest, yields the last:
Besides, he held two bridles fast,
The lady's palfrey having shown
Much wish to turn up lanes unknown.
Even sweet Anne can war not long
With sleep, the gentle and the strong;
And as the fingers of Sir Grey
By fine degrees give dulcet way,
And leave the happy beast his will,
The only creatures waking still
And free to go where fancy leads,
Are the twice eight bit-mumbling steeds.
Some few accordingly turn round,
Their happy memories homeward bound,
And soon awake their jolted lords,
Who bless themselves from bandit hordes,
And thinking they have only lagg'd,
Are willingly half jellybagg'd.
The rest,—the palfrey meek as any,—
Jog still onward with the many,

Passing now by Kilburn rill,
And now by Hampstead's leaf-stirr'd hill,
Which lulls them still as they descend
The sylvan trough of sweet North-end,
And till they reach thy plot serene,
And bowery granges, Golders-Green.

Now Golders-Green had then a road
(The same as that just re-bestow'd)
Which cross'd the main road, and went straight
To Finchley, and Sir Grey's own gate;
And thither, (every sleeper still
Depending on his horse's will,)
Thither, like sheep, turns every head
That follows where the sagest led,—
All but the palfrey's. He, good beast,
From his new master's clutch releas'd,
And longing much his old to see,
His stalls, and all his bounty free,
(For poor Sir William's household ways
Were nobler than the rich Sir Grey's,)
Goes neither to the right nor left,
But straight as honesty from theft,

Straight as the dainty to the tooth,
Straight as his lady's love and truth,
Straight for the point, the best of all,
Sir William's arms and Hendon Hall.

Not far from where we left them all,
Those steeds and sires, was Hendon Hall,
Some twice nine hundred yards or so;
And steeds to stables quickly go.
The lady wakes with the first start;
She cries aloud; she cowers at heart;
And looks around her in affright
On the wide, lonely, homeless night;
Then checks, as sharply as she may,
(Not yet aware how blest his way,)
Her yearning friend; and nighly faints,
And calls on fifty gentle saints,
And if she could, would close her eyes,
For fear of thieves and sorceries,
Of men all beard and blood, and calls
Over lone fields, and walking palls,

And elves that ever as you go,
Skip at your side with mop and mow,
With gibbering becks and moony stares,
Forcing your eyes to look on theirs.
And see! the moon forsakes the road;
She lifts her light to whence it flow'd:
Has she a good or ill bestow'd,
That thus her light forsakes the road?
The owls they hoot with gloomier cry;
They seem to see a murder nigh:
And how the palfrey snorts and pulls!
Now Mary help poor wandering fools!
The palfrey pulls, and he must go;
The lady's hand may not say No.
And go he does; the palfrey goes;
Merry again the palfrey goes;
He carrieth now no longer woes;
For she, e'en she, now thinks she knows,
Sweet Anne begins to think she knows
Those gathering huts, those poplar rows,
That water, falling as it flows,
This bridge o'er which the palfrey goes,

This gate, at which he stops, and shows
His love to it with greeting nose.
Ah! surely recollects she well
All she has heard her lover tell
Of this same gate, and that same bell:
And she it was, you guess full well,
That pull'd, and pull'd again that bell;
And down her love has come pell-mell
With page and squire, and all who ran,
And was the first to find his Anne;—
Was a most mad and blissful man,
Clasping his fainting, faithful Anne.

THE PALFREY.

Part Fifth.

THE PALFREY GOES, THE PALFREY GOES;
HIS WORK IS DONE, YOU MAY SUPPOSE.
NO:—DOUBLE BURDEN NOW HE KNOWS,
YET WELL FOR EVER THE PALFREY GOES.

The bells in many a giddy ring
Run down the wind to greet the King,
Who comes to feast, for service done,
With Earl De Vere at Kensington,
And brings with him his constant grace
Queen Eleanor, that angel's face.

In many-footed order free
First ride his guards, all staid to see;

In midst of whom the trumpets blow,
Straight as power and glory go ;
And then his lords and knights, each one
A manly splendour in the sun ;
And then his lofty self appears,
Calmer for the shouts he hears,
With his Queen the courteous-eyed,
Like strength and sweetness side by side ;
And thus, his banner steering all,
Rides the King to Earl-Mount Hall.

Meantime, ere yet the sovereign pair
Were threading London's closer air,
An humbler twain, heart-link'd as they,
Were hearing larks and scenting hay,
And coming, too, to Earl-Mount Hall
Through many a green lane's briery wall,
Many a brier and many a rose,
And merrily ever the palfrey goes,
Merrily though he carrieth two,
And one hath sometimes great ado
To sit while o'er the ruts he goes,
Nor clasp the other doubly close,

Who cannot chuse but turn, and then—
Why, if none see, he clasps again.
"Ah," thinks the lady, as she looks
Through tears and smiles with half-rebukes,
"Ah, *must* my father break his heart?
For surely now we never part."

Behind, some furlong off, and 'twixt
Those winding oaks with poplars mix'd,
Come two upon a second steed,
Male, too, and female; not indeed
The female young and fair as t'other:
She is the male's most honour'd mother.
Much talk they on the road;—at least
Much talks the mother; while the beast
Pulls at the hedges as he goes,
Pricking oft his tossing nose;
And the page, though listening, sees
Newts in the brooks and nests in trees.
Lastly a hound, tongue-lolling, courses
To and fro 'twixt both the horses,
Giving now some weasel chase,
And loving now his master's face,

And so, with many a turn and run,
Goes twenty furlongs to their one.

This riding double was no crime
In the first great Edward's time;
No brave man thought himself disgrac'd
By two fair arms about his waist;
Nor did the lady blush vermilion,
Dancing on the lover's pillion.
Why? Because all modes and actions
Bow'd not then to Vulgar Fractions;
Nor were tested all resources
By the power to purchase horses.

Many a steed yet won had he,
Our lover, in his chivalry;
For, in sooth, full half his rents
Were ransoms gain'd in tournaments;
But all, save these, were gone at present.—
Ah! the green lane still was pleasant.

Hope was theirs. For one sweet hour
Did they, last night, in bliss devour

Each other's questions, answers, eyes,
Nor ever for divine surprise
Could take a proper breath, much less
The supper brought in hastiness
By the glad little gaping page;
While rose, meantime, his mother sage
To wait upon the lady sweet,
And snore discreetly on the seat
In the window of the room,
Whence gleam'd her night-cap through the gloom.
Then parted they to lie awake
For transport, spite of all heart-ache:
For heaven's in any roof that covers,
Any one same night, two lovers;
They may be divided still;
They may want, in all but will;
But they know that each is there,
Each just parted, each in prayer;
Each more close, because apart,
And every thought clasp'd heart to heart.

Alas! in vain their hearts agree;
Good must seem good, as well as be;

And lest a spot should stain his flower
For blushing in a brideless bower,
Sir William with the lark must rise,
And bear,—but whither bear?—his prize:
Not to Sir Grey's, for that were scorn;
Not to Sir Guy's, to live forlorn;
Not to some abbey's jealous care,
For heav'n would try to wed her there;
But to a dame that serv'd the Queen,
His aunt, and no mean dame, I ween,—
A dame of rank, a dame of honour,
A dame (may earth lie green upon her!)
That felt for nature, love, and truth,
And hated old age pawing youth;
One, that at no time held wrong right,
Yet somehow took a dear delight
By secret measures, sweet and strong,
In giving right a zest of wrong.
To her Sir William brings his Anne
Three hours before the feast began;
But first has sent his page to spy
How day has dawn'd with old Sir Guy.

The page, scarce vanish'd, re-appears,
His eyes wide open as their ears,
And tells how all the beards are there !
All ;—every mump of quivering hair,
Come back with groan, and back with stare,
To set Sir Guy upon the rack,
And find the lady *not* come back.

" Now God bless all their groans and stares,
And eke their most irreverend hairs ! "
Cries the good dame, the Lady Maud,
Laughing with all her shoulders broad :—
" My budget bursteth sure with this !
This were a crowning galliardise
For king himself to tell in hall,
Against his lords' wit groweth small."
And, rustling in her vestments broad,
Forth sails the laughing Lady Maud
To tell the King and tell the Queen ;
But first she kiss'd sweet Anne between
The sighing lips and downcast eyes,
And said, " Old breaking hearts are lies."

Three hours have come, three hours have gone;
King Edward, with his crownet on,
Sits highest where the feast is set;
With wine the sweetest lips are wet;
The music makes a heaven above,
And underneath is talk of love.

The King look'd out from where he sat,
And cried, "Sir Guy de Paul!" Thereat
The music stopp'd with awe and wonder,
Like discourse when speaks the thunder;
And the feasters, one and all,
Gazed upon Sir Guy de Paul.

"How chanceth it, Sir Guy de Paul,
Your daughter graceth not the call
To the feast at Earl-Mount Hall?
My friends here boast her like the Queen:
What maketh such a face unseen?"

"Sir," quoth Sir Guy, "a loyal breast
Hath brought a man here, sore distress'd.

My daughter, through device, 'tis fear'd,
Of some false knight, hath disappear'd."

"Hah!" quoth the King; "since when, I pray?
They tell me 'twas but yesterday
That she was mark'd, for two long hours,
Praying behind her window-flowers."

"Alas! Sir, 'twas at night.—Forgive
My failing speech. I scarcely live
Till I have sought her, high and low,
And know, what then the King shall know."

"Now God confound all snares, and bring
Base hearts to sorrow!" cried the King;
"Myself will aid thee, and full soon.
Ho! master bard, good Rafe de Boon,
Pinch thy fair harp, and make it tell
Of those old thieves who slept so well."

The minstrel bow'd with blushing glee;
His harp into his arms took he,

And rous'd its pulses to a mood
Befitting love and hardihood.
Then, with his ready wit sincere,
He sang, to every tingling ear,
How fifteen brave old beards, one night,
Bore off one lady in a fright;
With what amazing knees they kept
Their saddles, and how fiercely slept;
And how a certain palfrey chose
To leave them to their proud repose,
And through the wildering night-time bear
The lady to her lover's care.
He named no names, he drew no face,
Yet not a soul mistook the case;
Till by degrees, boards, tap'stries, rafters,
Echoed the King's and feasters' laughters;
And once again, all Earl-Mount Hall
Gazed upon Sir Guy de Paul.

But how the laughter raged and scream'd,
When lo! those fifteen beards all stream'd
In at the great door of the hall!
Those very grey-beards, one and all,

By the King's command in thrall,
All mounted, and all scar'd withal,
And scarlet as Sir Guy de Paul!
By heavens! 'twas "merry in the hall,"
When every beard, but those, "wagg'd all."

Out spoke the King with wrathful breath,
Smiting the noise as still as death;—
"Are these the suitors, to destroy
My projects with new tales of Troy?
These the bold knights and generous lords
To wed our heiresses and wards?
Now, too, while Frenchman and while Scot
Have cost us double swords, God wot!
Are these replenishers of nations?
Begetters of great generations?
Out with them all! and bring to light
A fitter and a fairer sight."

Queen Eleanor glanc'd down the hall;
She pitied old Sir Guy de Paul,

Who while these doters went their way,
Knew neither how to go nor stay,
But sate bent close, his shame to smother,
Rubbing one hand upon the other.
A page she sent him, bright and mild,
Who led him forth, like his own child.

Out went the beards by a side door;
The great one roll'd apart once more,
And, as the King had given command,
In rode a couple, hand in hand,
Who made the stillness stiller:—he
A man to grace all jeopardy;
And all a lovely comfort, she.
The stalwart youth bestrode a steed,
A Barbary, the King's own breed;
The lady grac'd her palfrey still,
Sweet beast, that ever hath his will,
And paceth now, beside his lord,
Straight for the King at the high board,

Till sharp the riders halt, and wait
The speaking of the crowned state,—
The knight with reverential eyes,
Whose grateful hope no claim implies:
The lady in a bashful glow,
Her bosom billowing to and fro.

"Welcome! Sir William de la Barre,"
The monarch cried; "a right good star
For ladies' palfreys led astray;
And welcome, his fair flower of May.
By heavens! I will not have my knights
Defrauded of their lady rights.
I give thee, William de la Barre,
For this thy bride and that thy scar
Won from the big-limb'd traitor Pole,
The day thou dash'dst out half his soul
And let'st his ransom free, for ruth,
(For which thou wert a foolish youth,)
All those good meadows, lately his,
Down by the Brent, where thy hall is,
And all my rights in that same hall,

Together with the osieries all
That skirt the streams by down and dale,
From Hendon into Perivale.
And now dismount. And hark ye, there,
Sir Priest, my chaplain Christopher,
(See how the honest body dries
The tears of claret in his eyes!)—
Come, and betroth these friends of mine,
Till at the good Earl's chapel shrine
Thy holy magic make them one:
The King and Queen will see it done.
But first a royal health to all
The friends we leave in this fair hall;
And may all knights' and ladies' horses
Take, like the palfrey, vigorous courses!"

With princely laughter rose the King,
Rose all, the laughter echoing,
Rose the proud wassail, rose the shout
By the trumpets long stretch'd out;
You would have thought, that roof and all
Rose in that heart-lifted hall.

On their knees are two alone;
The palfrey and the barb have gone:
And then arose those two beside,
And the music from its pride
Falls into a beauteous prayer,
Like an angel quitting air;
And the King and his soft Queen
Smile upon those two serene,
Whom the priest, accosting bland,
Puts, full willing, hand in hand.
Ah! scarcely even King and Queen
Did they then perceive, I ween;
Nor well to after-memory call,
How they went from out that hall.

What more? Sir Guy, and then Sir Grey,
Died each upon a fine spring day;
And, in their hatred of things small,
Left him, now wanting nothing, all.
The daughter wept, and wept the more
To think her tears would soon be o'er;
Sir William neither wept nor smil'd,
But grac'd the father for the child,

And sent, to join the funeral shows,
Bearing scutcheons, bearing woes,
The palfrey ; and full well he goes ;
Oh ! merrily well the palfrey goes ;
Grief, great as any there he knows,
Yet merrily ever the palfrey goes.

THE END.

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